

Message Text

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TAGS PINT PFOR CO

SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. THE GRIM NEWS REPORTS FROM LIMA GRIPPED THE ATTENTION OF THE BOGOTA PUBLIC, EVOKING MEMORIES OF THE BLOODY BOGOTAZO OF A QUARTER CENTURY AGO. THE WIREPHOTOS OF ANGRY CROWDS AND BURNING BLDGS, STRIKINGLY SIMILAR TO THE 1948 PHOTOS OF DOWNTOWN BOGOTA, COULD NOT BE REINFORCE THE DETERMINATION OF COLOMBIANS TO EFFECT CHANGES IN THEIR SOCIETY THROUGH EXISTING INSTITUTIONS. SIXTEEN YEARS OF NATIONAL FRONT GOVT OFFERED LESS CHOICE THAN MANY COLOMBIANS WOULD HAVE PREFERRED AND THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION HAS FALLEN SHORT OF LAST APRIL'S HIGH EXPECTATIONS; THE TRAGIC EVENTS IN LIMA, HOWEVER PROVIDED A HARSH REMINDER OF THE COLOMBIAN ALTERNATIVE OF THE 1940'S AND 50'S.

2. COLOMBIAN INSTITUTIONS CONTINUED TO RECEIVE AMPLE CHALLENGES, ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT THE COST OF LIVING ROSE AGAIN IN JAN, THIS TIME BY THE HIGHEST JAN RATE IN 14 YEARS WITH FOOD PRICES LEADING THE WAY. THE PRESS REPORTED THAT COLOMBIA'S SMALL AUTO-MOBILE INDUSTRY, IN COMMON WITH SIMILAR INDUSTRIES ELSEWHERE, HAD AN UNWIELDY INVENTORY OF UNSOLD CARS. COLOMBIA'S OUTSPOKEN
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LABMIN, SPEAKING FROM HER HOSPITAL BED, ACCUSED THE COMMUNIST

LED TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF ATTEMPTING TO UNDERMINE THE LOPEZ ADMIN. DESPITE THE STRAINS HOWEVER, BOGOTANOS WERE WELL AWARE THAT THEIR CITYSCAPE WAS MARRED ONLY BY CONSTRUCTION CRANES AND DENSE TRAFFIC, IN CONTRAST TO LIMA TODAY AND BOGOTA OF 1948.

3. EVENTS ABROAD, OTHER THAN THOSE IN PERU, RECEIVED LITTLE ATTENTION DURING THE WEEK. A COLOMBIAN POPULAR SINGER, CLAUDIA, AROUSED A DISPROPORTIONATE RESPONSE FROM THE VENZUELAN AUTHORITIES WHEN, DURING AN ENGAGEMENT IN THAT INTERESTING COUNTRY, SHE ASKED THE PRES WHEN HE WOULD RETURN THE MONJES ISLANDS. AT WEEK'S END AN AMUSED COLOMBIAN PUBLIC PREPARED TO WELCOME HOME (TO GREATER FAME THAN HAD HERETOFORE BEEN HERS) THE ATTRACTIVE AND OUTSPOKEN SINGER.

4. A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE NOTE IN COLOMBIAN-VENEZUELAN RELATIONS WAS STRUCK WHEN ON FEB 6, THE TWO NATIONS NAMED A MIXED COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE RECENT EVENTS IN THE BORDER AREA, PARTICULARLY THE REPORTED DISCOVERY OF ELEVEN BODIES IN THE FRONTIER COUNTRYSIDE. THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN BOGOTA OF THE COMMISSION COMPOSED ON EACH SIDE OF TWO POLICE OFFICIALS AND ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BORDER COMMUNITY,

WAS MADE IN A ROUTINE MANNER ACCOMPANIED BY CONSTRUCTIVE COMMENTS FROM THE BOGOTA PRESS.

5. LABOR MINISTER FEUDS PUBLICLY WITH COMMUNISTS. THE PUBLIC SPARRING MATCH BETWEEN THE COMMUNIST-LED TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (CSTC) AND LABOR MINISTER MARIA ELENA DE CROVO, WHICH BEGAN IN MEDELLIN SEVERAL WEEKS AGO WHEN THE MINISTER ACCUSED THE COMMUNISTS OF TRYING TO BRING DOWN THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT THROUGH COORDINATED STRIKE ACTIVITY, (BOGOTA 0555) BECAME A VERBAL WAR DURING THE WEEK. FROM HER HOSPITAL BED, MARIA ELENA TAPED A SPEECH FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE LAST OF THE SEMINARS ON SOCIAL SECURITY IN BOGOTA FEBRUARY 1 IN WHICH SHE CASTIGATED THE CSTC FOR ITS "OUTRAGES AND ANNOYANCES" AGAINST THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION AND THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC. REPEATING THE LOPEZ ELECTION THEME OF LABOR UNITY, THE MINISTER DISPARAGED THE COMMUNISTS FOR ATTEMPTING TO ORGANIZE A SO-CALLED UNITY CONGRESS FOR MARCH 4-8, 1975, ASKING ON WHAT BASIS THE COMMUNISTS PRESUMED TO SPEAK FOR THE WORKING CLASS. TO SUPPORT HER THEME MINISTER DE CROVO CITED RECENT LABOR MINISTRY STATISTICS ON THE NUMBER OF UNIONS BELONGS TO

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EACH OF THE FOUR CONFEDERATIONS IN COLOMBIA. ACCORDING TO THESE FIGURES, THE UNION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (UTC) HAS NEARLY 40 PERCENT OF THE UNIONS, THE COLOMBIAN WORKERS CONFEDERATION (CTC) 12 PERCENT, THE CSTC, NEARLY 11 PERCENT, AND THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF WORKERS (CGT), WHICH IS NOT YET LEGAL, ABOUT 2.5 PERCENT. THE FIGURES ALSO SHOW THAT APPROXIMATELY 36 PERCENT OF THE UNIONS ARE INDEPENDENT. (THE MINISTER FAILED TO MENTION, HOWEVER, THAT WHILE THE NUMBER OF CSTC UNIONS ONLY EXCEEDS THAT OF THE CGT, SEVERAL OF THESE UNIONS

HAVE LARGE MEMBERSHIPS, INCLUDING THE TEACHERS FEDERATION (FECODE) WITH OVER 100,000. IF THE MINISTER HAD CITED MEMBERSHIP FIGURES, THE CSTC, WITH PERHAPS 300,000 TOTAL MEMBERS WOULD RANK SECOND BEHIND THE UTC WITH 600 TO 800,000 MEMBERS). BY MID-WEEK THE MINISTER HAD LEFT THE HOSPITAL, TO REST HER SWOLLEN LEG IN HER HOME, THE BANK WORKERS STRIKE (BOGOTA 805) HAD COMPLETELY DIED OUT, AND THE CSTC RESPONDED TO THE MINISTER IN THE WEEKLY VOZ PROLETARIA DESCRIBING HER AS A "MACARTYITE", ACCUSING THE GOC OF LAUNCHING AN OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE CSTC'S UNITY CONGRESS, AND PEDGING THAT THE CSTC WOULD BE VICTORIOUS. MEAWHILE, THE UTC AND CTC PROMISED COOPERATION WITH THE GOC IN ITS FIGHT AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS.

6. FARC KIDNAPS HONORARY DUTCH CONSUL. ON THE EVENING OF 31 JAN 1975 THE HONORARY DUTCH CONSUL AND CALI INDUSTRIALIST, ERIK LEUPIN, WAS KIDNAPPED FROM AN ENCAMPMENT OF HIS REFORESTATION COMPANY LOCATED IN THE REMOTE NORTHEAST OF CAUCA DEPARTMENT. ONE WORKER WAS KILLED DURING THE KIDNAPPING. BASED ON INITIAL REPORTS THAT THE KIDNAPPERS WERE WELL ARMED AND IN CAMOUFLAGE UNIFORMS IT IS MOST PROBABLY THAT THEY BELONGED TO THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC) THE GUERRILLA ACTION ARM OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF COLOMBIA. TO DATE THERE HAS BEEN NO REPORT AS TO THE REASON FOR THE KIDNAPPING ALTHOUGH IT IS PROBABLE THAT A RANSOM DEMAND WILL BE FORTHCOMING. THE KIDNAPPERS MIGHT ALSO DEMAND THE RELEASE OF SELECTED FARC GUERRILLAS NOW BEING HELD IN COLOMBIAN JAILS.

7. CONTINUED HIGH INFLATION. THE GOVERNMENT STATISICAL AGENCY (DANE) ANNOUNCED THAT THE COST-OF-LIVING INDEX DURING JANUARY ROSE BY 3.1 PERCENT FOR BLUE COLLAR WORKERS AND 2.3 PERCENT FOR WHITE COLLAR WORKERS. THE JANUARY 1973 TO JANUARY 1974 COMPOSITE RATE WAS 26 PERCENT. THE SHARP INCREASE WAS ATTRIBUTED TO BASIC FOODSTUFFS SUCH AS POTATES AND YUCA. EDITORIAL WRITERS AND PRIVATE SECTOR SPOKESMEN HAVE BEEN SHARPLY CRITICAL OF THE APPARENT GOC INABILITY TO CONTROL INFLATION EVEN THOUGH THEY

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CONCEDE UNUAUAL FACTORS SUCH AS DAMAGING FROSTS DURING DECEMBER AND JANUARY.
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